

THE THIRD ORDER OF SAINT FRANCIS: Instrument of Peace



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OF SAINT FRANCIS:
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man which, if made available to the faithful through the Rule of the Third Order, would lead multitudes of modern men and women to Christ and the teachings of His Gospel as it did in ages past. And in the long history of Christianity surely there never was a time when men and women needed the Gospel of Christ and the spirit of Francis more than they do in these dark days. And they will continue to need them in the troubled years ahead!

August 23, 1943.

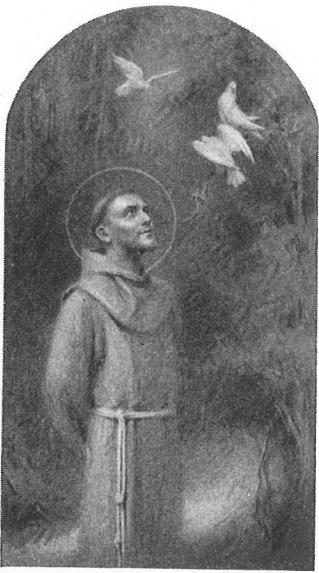
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the sick in malaria-stricken districts. Thus they passed their lives laying up treasures in heaven.

Buona Donna had prayed that she would not outlive her gentle, saintly husband, and her prayers were granted. Both fell mortally ill, and as death came for Buona Donna, Luchesio left his own bed of death to assist her in her last agony. When his "Gracious Lady" had preceded him through the door of eternity, Luchesio followed her within the hour. As the old Chronicle puts it, "in death they were not divided."

By his two Encyclicals (*Auspicato*, September 17, 1882, and *Misericors Dei Filius*, May 30, 1883) and his revision of the Third Order Rule to suit modern times, Pope Leo XIII, himself an ardent Tertiary, awakened that vast and lively interest in the Third Order which in the sixty years that have elapsed since then has brought its membership to well over 3,000,000 Tertiaries. Like Ugoline, Leo XIII saw in the spirit of Francis that sublime and vivifying love of God and

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SAINt FRANCIS
LOVER OF CREATURES

In those days everyone belonged either to the Ghibellines, the Emperor's party, or to the Guelphs, the Pope's allies. Luchesio, belonging to the Guelphs, was forced to flee with his wife to the neighborhood of Florence when his party suffered a military reverse. Thus taken out of public affairs, Luchesio turned his thoughts to the improvement of his soul. Francis found him in this mood, and proposed the Rule for Penitents to him as a guide and help to greater perfection. Luchesio studied it and saw its value as a spiritual instrument for shaping souls for heaven; he noted especially its insistence on the practice of poverty and its call for a simple and penitential life. He consulted his wife, and with her permission sold all but a few acres of his land. Then he received from Francis himself the first habit of the Third Order. After some time Buona Donna followed her husband's example. Together they devoted themselves to prayer, penance and works of charity, giving of their now slender means to the poor, and nursing

thus: Francis had reached into heaven and had drawn forth that spark of universal love which would electrify the world, and Ugoline carefully worked out and set down the formula for applying it to the souls of men and the legitimate temporal interests of Christ's Church.

And the effect of the Rule of the Third Order on the very first person to profess it—a man of the town of Poggibonzi near Florence,* named Luchesio—is a fair example of its effect on the multitudes who later took it as their rule of life. Luchesio (who, some say, had been a boyhood friend of Francis) was a retired merchant when Francis happened across him in the spring of 1221. In his younger days he had been a gay blade, and in later life a man of consequence in public affairs in the neighborhood of Siena. He had married a beautiful and charming girl on whom friends later conferred the complimentary title of "Buona Donna" (Gracious Lady).

*The first Third Order fraternity was established in Florence, May 20, 1221,

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F RANCIS OF ASSISI was one of Christendom's most successful promoters of peace, for he was one of Christendom's most prominent preachers of penance. He who lived so completely by the Gospel realized with a clarity grasped by few, the evangelical truth that penance, pointed and strong, must precede peace as the needle must precede the thread. Does the Gospel itself, the Christ-given charter of peace, not begin with John's cry to those who had come to the wilderness to hear him: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 3:2)? In these words was the world told that Christ was about to come forth and preach to men that the way to salvation lies along the hard road of penance. And so, in fact, He came. "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the king-

dom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mk. 1:14, 15). And had not Francis himself experienced in the days of his "conversion" the direct relationship between penance and peace? Was it not after he had overcome himself by kissing the leper's hand, after he had "left the world" and performed extraordinary penances, that he found peace?

Francis saw clearly that sin and sin alone had thrown the whole moral world out of balance; and that only the practice of penance and coöperation with grace could restore that balance for the individual and the world; he saw too that once that balance was restored, men would find peace. Therefore did he preach penance. One of the many fruits of his preaching was the formation of the "Order of Penitents," as the Third Order was at first called and is still called in the church's liturgy. That institution of penance brought peace to individuals and cities and communities

ing about two of the reforms inaugurated by Innocent III: the reawakening of spiritual life throughout Christendom, and the defense of the Papal States. He saw and correctly appraised Francis' followers as a potential army that would fight for a better world, not with the weapons of war but with the tools of peace; not only in Italy but throughout the world; not alone in his day but through all the future. And these tools were prayer, penance, moderation in food, drink and costume, obedience to the laws of God and the Church, loyalty to the Vicar of Christ, love of neighbor, charity to enemies, honesty in business and justice toward all.

Ugoline saw this potentiality in the throngs who hearkened enraptured to Francis. And in his legalistic manner he wrote for them the Rule of the Third Order, which is essentially an instrument of peace. And behind him as he wrote stood Francis, enriching with his personality every phrase and clause his careful hand set down. It might be expressed

understanding heart can beat beneath purple and fine linen.

Nor was this intermingling of classes local or transitory. It was practised throughout Europe for three hundred years, and had it been allowed to continue our present day would not be witnessing the class hatreds that exist and the suicidal fury with which capital and labor regard each other. But the Reformation swept it all away. The materialistic philosophy which that movement engendered substituted the worship of the State for the worship of God; and in due time this same pragmatism gave us master races and global wars, and made a man's bank account the measure of his civic, social and even intellectual value. Such was the evidence of things that brought Pope Leo XIII to repeat time and again: "My plan for social reform is the Third Order."

As we have quoted, Cardinal Ugoline saw in the many enthusiastic followers of Francis a tremendous spiritual force that could be harnessed to the effort of bringing

and even to nations for three hundred years, until in the sixteenth century Martin Luther and his followers flooded Christendom with the theological errors that eventually left the heavy silt of materialism over a great portion of Europe.

During the following three centuries the roots of the Third Order remained alive, but the stem and flower were scarcely able to push their way up through the moral sludge deposited by the Reformation. Then toward the end of the nineteenth century, Pope Leo XIII, surveying with an eagle eye the universal havoc that error had wrought in religion, education, culture, politics and the home, reached back into history and drew forth the Rule of the Third Order of Saint Francis. After examining it closely, he reëdited it to suit the needs of his day, and this new edition he gave to the faithful that they might live again by the Gospel, and living by it find peace at least in their hearts and homes — for the nations had gone too far from their Father's home to be recalled by self-imposed penance, but

must needs fight their way back through wars and blood.

The Third Order of Saint Francis was not the first institution of its kind in the Church. The Oblates of Saint Benedict, the Norbertine Seculars and the Secular Order of the Humiliati preceded it. But it eventually enrolled a greater membership, became more universal and attracted a longer list of notables in Church and State than any and all of the others. Since the aims of its predecessors had been to bring souls closer to God through exhorting them to greater penances, more fervent prayers and more frequent reception of the Sacraments, the Third Order of Saint Francis resembles them in many ways; and one of them, the Secular Order of the Humiliati, has been thought by some to have inspired Cardinal Ugo-line in suggesting to Francis the formation of such an institution within the framework of the Franciscan apostolate. Be that as it may, Francis in conjunction with the Cardinal did give to the world his Third Order, the Order of Penitents.

Thus the penance and the evangelical poverty which Francis preached penetrated and purified the highest strata of society, and engendered among the wealthy a warm sympathy for the poor; and it gave to the destitute a spirit of resignation and took from their hearts that resentment toward the rich which their condition of poverty might so naturally have prompted.

In this way, the Third Order brought the two classes of society to a better understanding of each other and consequently to a higher mutual regard. The rich discovered that among the poor there are beauties and refinements of soul which are not the possession of the rich alone; and that a domestic peace and love often reign in the homes of the humble, whereas jealousies, hatreds and infidelities (as they themselves knew) too often sit in gloom behind the façades of the wealthy. And, on the other hand, the poor came to see that not all the rich were tyrants and oppressors, but that a kind and

to be spent luxuriously but moderately, and mainly for the relief of the poor and the propagation of the Faith.

Two of the earliest Tertiaries are ideal examples of the Christian use of wealth, namely Lord Orlando of Chuisi, who gave La Verna to the fraternity, and Lady Giacoma di Settesoli of Rome. Both had inherited large estates, but since their properties belonged to their families and had to be handed on to posterity, they could not freely dispose of them. They administered them for the common good, however, and after deducting what was necessary for their personal needs they gave the rest to the poor, the sick and the Church. Nor were these Tertiaries exceptions among the members of the Third Order, but rather examples of the majority. Saint Elizabeth of Hungary had the friars sing a *Te Deum* when she was unjustly deprived of her throne and brutally thrown out into the night with her children; and King Louis wore a hair-shirt beneath his rich royal robes.

It may be said in passing that it is difficult to determine just what was the status of the first members of the Third Order. As we know, Francis attracted many men and women who could not join the First or Second Orders by reason of business and domestic circumstances. And the question is, just how far did these people go in embracing his ideals? Many of the men may actually have gone to live near the Portiuncula and other Franciscan houses and hermitages, and the women may have kept close to St. Damian's and the other convents of the Poor Clares. One thing is certain: such was his appeal to all to return to the way of perfection which Christ had taught, such was the hunger of the masses to be shown a method by which they could return to that way, that not only individuals but multitudes literally left all and followed him. Probably, as some writers have suggested, of the large numbers of people who, attracted by the preaching and example of the Saint, attached themselves to him, three distinct groups were

formed — those who gave up everything to follow him (the Friars Minor), the women who were inspired to live a cloistered life according to his ideals (the Poor Clares), and those who wished to live a life of simplicity in the world under his direction (the Order of Penitents).

Whatever may have been the historical order of events, we know that in the winter of 1220-1221, Cardinal Ugoline, in consultation with Francis, instituted the Third Order. It is said that Ugoline himself composed the Rule, and wrote it with his own hand. And as critics have pointed out, this Rule of the Third Order has on it the stamp of Ugoline's highly trained and organizing mind. It is indeed a code of legal constitutions, succinct and to the point, such as an ecclesiastical lawyer might be expected to draw up. But if the hand is the hand of Ugoline, the voice that attracted the multitudes to the Portiuncula eager for such a Rule is the voice of Francis.

There is scarcely room to doubt that Ugoline, pursuing the far-reaching poli-

growth. Men found peace in its otherworldliness. "Strive not for the things that perish," it kept repeating in the midst of a world gone mad in the pursuit of wealth and pleasure. "Do not let thy left hand know what thy right hand is doing," it kept prompting in a time when greed was rampant. "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect," it urged when the moral tone was low indeed and "the hearts of men had grown cold."

Once when Christ was speaking on the spiritual dangers of being attached to wealth, He said: "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves with the mammon of wickedness [riches], so that when you fall [die] they may receive you into the everlasting dwellings" (Lk. 16:9). He meant to warn the rich to use their wealth to win heaven for themselves, by giving alms, by contributing to worthy charities and by assisting the Church in her material needs — that is, by regarding their wealth as a trust from God not to be used for themselves exclusively, not

Ugoline later became Pope he permitted Tertiaries to take oaths as peacemakers, in defense of the Faith, in self-defense and as witnesses in court. Pope Nicholas IV, himself a Franciscan, in 1289 declared that Tertiaries were free to carry arms in defense of the Church and of their own country.

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This is the spirit of brotherhood which the Third Order fostered in the hearts of its members under the inspiration of Francis; and this it is that explains its

cies of the Church, had a specific and strategic reason for instituting the Third Order. First and foremost, of course, was the spiritual motive which led him as a great churchman to further any legitimate program that would bring souls closer to God; but over and above that, he saw in Francis' enthusiastic and numerous lay-followers throughout Italy a potential force which could be used in an indirect manner to advance the papal cause against Frederick II. It is not that he saw in these devotees a multitude which could be taken directly into the papal armies as that, *by forbidding them as members of a religious order to bear arms, he would deprive the Emperor of his chief source of Italian recruits.* For a large percentage of the Italian peasants were serfs, bound by oath to support their feudal lords in any and every cause. And the feudal lords were on the side of the Emperor.

Ugoline's move was a stroke of genius which he copied from Innocent III. In

1201 that Pope had withdrawn the Secular Order of the Humiliati from the Emperor's forces by forbidding them to take "unnecessary oaths." Innocent's ban was more subtle than Ugoline's, inasmuch as it was more harmless-looking; yet in reality it had the same effect, for it meant that the Humiliati could not take the oath to bear arms for their feudal lords, and therefore for the Emperor, Otto IV. In both instances the ecclesiastical ban on bearing arms had the effect desired. The Humiliati refused military service, as later did the Tertiaries; and thus they reduced the power of the Emperor against the Pope. As a result, both groups were persecuted by the civil authorities; and both were in turn defended by the reigning Pontiffs. This refusal of the Tertiaries to support their feudal lords in unjust wars was eventually a strong factor in bringing about the end of the feudal system. For a lord who could not supply his king with soldiers was of no value to the king. And when lord after

lord was in this manner rendered impotent, the whole structure in time collapsed.

If the crusades severed the roots of feudalism, the Third Order of Saint Francis helped to pull down the tree that had borne such evil fruit, and by so doing gave freedom and the spirit of freedom to the peasant and the artisan. And thus it is that the lowly Portuncula where men came to pray with the freedom-loving Francis is called "the cradle of democracy." If the Third Order had accomplished nothing but this, it would deserve the gratitude of mankind for all time.

Since conscientious objectors have at times quoted this precept of the Third Order forbidding Tertiaries to bear arms as an ecclesiastical precedent for their own refusal to enlist in their country's defense, it may be well to state that this ban applied *only to wars of aggression*, and that in just and defensive wars the Tertiaries take their place in battle line with their fellow countrymen. When